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THE QUESTION OF SPANISH PRONUNCIATION

What pronunciation of Spanish ought to be taken as the standard in the schools and colleges of this country? Should it be the Castilian exclusively, even when the interests of the students are purely commercial? Or should we teach certain elements of pronunciation which are common to most of Latin America and a portion of Spain? Would it be wise to segregate students whose interest is in history and literature, and teach them differently from the commercial students? Ought we to strive for uniformity in Spanish pronunciation among institutions and among the students of the same institution? These questions were asked of a number of teachers of Spanish and other persons interested. Replies were received from 54 teachers of Spanish in 41 colleges and universities; from seven teachers in six schools; and from 14 other persons, including several school-officials; total, 75 replies. They came from all sections of the country; and while the inquiry might have been largely extended both here and in South America, the present returns may be taken as fairly representative of educational opinion in this country.

The subject is regarded as highly important by some, as relatively unimportant by others. Only about half of the replies take up specifically the questions of segregation and uniformity. Eighteen maintain that all students of Spanish should be taught alike for the first year or two years; while 11 favor segregating commercial students, even in the elementary courses, from those who have an interest in literature. Thirty-two think that uniformity of pronunciation ought to be insisted on, 10 are indifferent on this point. A professor in an important university says:

In my own classes I teach Castilian, and one of my assistants teaches Costa Rican, and I am perfectly satisfied. The difference of pronunciation between Castilian and the various Spanish American dialects is not a serious nor even an important question, and I see no reason for striving for uniformity.

In reply to the more important question as to what pronunciation should be the standard, 62 from all parts of the country unequivocally favor Castilian as the only standard which should be considered, and four more prefer it less emphatically. Only nine

of the 75 declare in favor of other than the Castilian pronunciation. Of these nine, one, a Mexican, thinks that everybody should learn the Mexican pronunciation; the others advocate the use of certain elements which are general in Latin America. A teacher in a New England college believes that "we should strive for uniformity. . . . But rather than teach Castilian I should prefer not to be 'regular.'" Another New England college teacher says:

I do not think Castilian pronunciation should be the standard for North American students. I advocate the use of certain elements common to nearly all parts of Latin America and to a portion of Spain. . . . I am teaching at present a pronunciation which I find is perfectly acceptable to educated people of any of the twenty Spanish-speaking countries south of us.

A commercial attaché, a graduate of Yale, writes as follows:

Castilian Spanish should not be taught for any but very special students. It is only natural that language should vary from one country to another and that in every republic of South America one should find variations. But the same thing is observed in English. . . . One can surely say that the Castilian is beautiful, attractive, and so forth, but not that it is the most correct Spanish. It is that for a limited portion of Spain, but certainly not for South America. On the other hand, one can learn a Spanish which is characteristic of no country or region, but is correct for all countries or regions. . . . Combine the Castilian which is foreign to South America with an execrable American foreignness, and you approach the unintelligible.

Professor F. B. Luquiens of Yale has been widely quoted as opposed to the teaching of Castilian pronunciation. In his important article, "The National Need of Spanish" (*Yale Review*, July, 1915), he insisted that we "must teach the Spanish of South America, not, as now, the Spanish of Spain;" but he added that the most evident difference between the two, that of pronunciation, "is of no importance at all for the question in hand." He now writes as follows:

I believe, in theory, that our teaching of Spanish should be Spanish-American in material and Castilian in method. That is, I believe that we should deal entirely with Spanish-American material, but that our grammars and composition books should present Castilian grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. In practice, however, I personally depart from this theory to the very slight extent of adopting that artificial pronunciation which some call the "Spanish-American pronunciation;" i. e., Castilian pro-

nunciation with the substitution of *ss* for *th* and *y* for *ll*. . . . Let me repeat, however, that I consider every teacher who in his classroom reads about Latin America a convert to the cause, even though he teaches the purest Castilian pronunciation.

During the first years of the present century a marked stimulus was given to the study of Spanish by the war between Spain and the United States, and by the era of good feeling which succeeded its close; whereas the tremendous increase of the last three or four years is due entirely to an interest in Latin America. This interest is shown not only by the number of students of Spanish in our colleges, but also by the introduction of the language into secondary schools—even into schools where French is not taught; by the increasing employment of Latin Americans as teachers; and by the present tendencies of text-book publishing. Many persons, rejoicing in the “practical” value of Spanish, would be glad to see it replace to a large extent French and German, to say nothing of Italian or Latin. Others deplore the tendency to make the study of Spanish merely a tool for commercial and political activities, rather than an instrument of education and culture. It is evident that most of the students have little or no interest in Spain and her literature. Everyone can admit the importance of having an intelligent and sympathetic attitude toward South America, and in any case the demand for instruction in Spanish must be met. Will it not be possible, while meeting the practical requirements of the situation, to use this study also as a mental discipline and as a means of culture? In view of all these considerations, what should be our policy in regard to the pronunciation?

As already indicated, seven-eighths of the replies received favor the use of Castilian. When the Pan American division of the American Association for International Conciliation distributed reprints of Professor Luquiens’ article, the director, Dr. Peter H. Goldsmith, added an insert expressing his absolute dissent from the view that South American pronunciation should be taught in this country. Under the date of December 22, 1916, Dr. Goldsmith writes:

I have just returned from a trip of six months through South America, and my observation and experience only serve to strengthen what I said in the circular. I think that all students, whatever be their motive for taking up the study of Spanish, ought to be taught Castilian. I think I have heard all the arguments in

favor of any other pronunciation, and none of them seems to me to have any weight whatever.

Mr. F. J. Yánes, assistant director of the Pan American Union, says in a memorandum which he has prepared in answer to numerous inquiries: "Although each country has a right to develop some individuality in its speech, any foreign language should be studied from the classic point of view, that is, in accordance with what is accepted as the highest standard of pronunciation and vocabulary." The Spanish of Castile, he continues, is the standard. A former minister to Argentina writes:

I think the best pronunciation is the best, or in other words, the Castilian. . . . All Latin-Americans are complimented by being addressed with the Castilian pronunciation. . . . Students should be made acquainted with the different accents which have grown up in certain parts of Latin America, but I firmly believe that they should commence their studies with the pronunciation which is used among the better classes in Old Spain.

From an eastern college comes this statement of "a native Spaniard, a graduate of Spanish colleges, and a teacher of the language in this country:"

What pronunciation would you give to any language but its purest and most correct? Avoiding personalities, allow me to state that suggestions, similar to those you mention as being offered to you by so-called instructors, are not only ludicrous but almost criminal. . . . The Spanish language is officially taught uniformly in all the schools of the Spanish speaking world. There is only one sound to each of its vowels, only one value to each of its consonants. Any corruption or alteration is due entirely to persons and localities, and is not sanctioned by the Academy.

A professor in a western university writes:

Of course I believe only in Castilian pronunciation in the classroom. . . . A teacher must adopt a standard and cannot be swayed by the absurd notion that we must make constant concessions to our neighbors who pronounce Spanish in fifty different ways. . . . Every single argument I have ever heard in favor of so-called South American Spanish, which does not exist, is a purely sentimental one or based on some prejudice against Spain.

An interesting letter from a university "almost on the border of Mexico" says in part:

We teach in the University but one pronunciation, the Castilian, and have never experienced any difficulty in convincing the stu-

dents that it is the most advisable to learn. Personally, I do not see how it is possible to do otherwise. The pronunciation and vocabulary in the various countries of South America differ so widely that it would be difficult to select the ones most desirable. . . . The two instructors in the department, besides myself, are from Mexican families and both teach the Castilian pronunciation and prefer to do so. We have a considerable number of students who speak Spanish fluently. In such cases we never insist that the student change the pronunciation in the classroom. No difficulty is experienced from having both Castilian and Mexican pronunciation used in the same class. Students should know both. . . . I am especially interested in the Spanish American countries and in their literatures, but I should dislike very much to see the study of these countries and of their literatures, with the American pronunciation, supplant the mother country in our work in elementary Spanish.

A university in the Middle West reports:

We have three Spanish Americans teaching in our department and each and every one of them is of the opinion that the Castilian pronunciation is preferable to the American pronunciation as a norm to place before the students.

Another university in the same region:

We should teach the Castilian pronunciation. It has been argued by some people of purely commercial interests that the Castilian sounds affected or stilted to the Spanish American. This does not agree with my experience. They consider it rather the *good* Spanish, and their own pronunciation dialectal.

A college in New England:

I see no possible harm in having students pronounce as the Castilians do, even if they are to associate with South Americans, and I believe there is at least the possibility of harm in admitting the American pronunciation.

A large Commercial High School in an eastern city:

Where the language is not taught for purely commercial purposes I believe that the Castilian pronunciation should be used. In commercial schools and courses I am in doubt as to this matter, but am rather inclined to favor the Castilian pronunciation, which, by the way, we use in our school. It would be practicable, of course, to teach the peculiarities that are general in Spanish America, but then we would have something that is characteristic of no country.

Another large High School:

I am strongly in favor of the use of the Castilian pronunciation. . . . No one can say that this or that is South American Spanish. There are as many standards as there are Spanish republics. Why teach a dialect instead of what is universally recognized, even by its opponents, to be the only pronunciation that can be considered the norm?

A large eastern university:

The only thing that is nearly common to all parts of Latin America is the Castilian pronunciation.

A university on the Pacific Coast:

In all Spanish America there has always been and there is now a strong tendency to follow the Castilian Spanish in matters of pronunciation and grammar. Among all the countries of South America there is no standard except the general tendency to imitate Castilian standards.

It would be interesting to quote from the letters received many more statements similar to the above, and many of the arguments presented; but this would take so much space that it will be possible only to summarize. The only argument brought forward against the use of Castilian is that of convenience in intercourse with Spanish Americans; as one letter puts it:

Though undoubtedly the Castilian pronunciation is considered the most correct, I believe that, to obtain the ends in view in the teaching of Spanish in the Universities of the United States, it is more feasible and convenient and at the same time easier to teach the Latin American pronunciation.

There is wide disagreement in regard to the variations of language between the American countries. The truth of the matter is probably contained in this statement (from California):

The differences that are really pertinent are to be found only among the uneducated classes. . . . The real differences between the Spanish of the educated in Spain (Castile or any other section), Mexico, Chile, etc., have been greatly exaggerated. The only real difference is to be found in the pronunciation of *ll* and *z* (also *c* before *e* or *i*). . . . Since in our schools we must choose a standard, we should choose the best standard. We must therefore choose the Castilian.

The matter apparently reduces itself, then, to the sound of *ll*, *z*, and *c*, unless some local dialect be adopted. While some writers

would insist on absolute uniformity, many others think that students who have learned one pronunciation ought not to be compelled to adopt another; and also that South Americans teaching in this country, if they prefer to follow the inferior standard, should be allowed to do so in order to preserve their spontaneity. In the face of this is the fact that many South Americans, though not all, prefer to teach the Castilian sounds. In every case, evidently, the differences should be carefully pointed out to the student; and if the instructor departs from the best usage, he is in honor bound to state that he is doing so. It must also be made plain that many persons of wide experience in South and Central America strongly maintain that a foreigner gets on better and is more respected if he speaks like a Castilian than if he attempts to conform to local usage. The following are the chief arguments advanced:

1. Castilian pronunciation, used in the capital and regulated by the Spanish Academy, is the only recognized standard.
2. It is understood everywhere in Spanish America and is not thought affected in a foreigner.
3. It is generally taught in the schools of South America and is regarded even by those who do not use it as the purest form of the language.
4. No other standard is possible in Spanish America, on account of jealousy between the different republics.
5. Any student who learns Castilian can readily adopt the pronunciation of whatever country he may have dealings with, while after learning an American pronunciation it would be far more difficult to change to Castilian. This point is emphasized by several writers.
6. Spanish orthography, distinguished for its accuracy, is based on the Castilian pronunciation. The use of the sounds given to *ll*, *z* and *c* in American countries inevitably results in continual mistakes in spelling, in case the student has not first learned the Castilian sounds. This important practical consideration, which many writers mention, should not be forgotten.

The result of this discussion is that, unless we use the pronunciation of some one region of America, we have the choice between "a Spanish which is characteristic of no country or region," and the Spanish which is generally recognized as the standard. One of the

advocates of South American Spanish rather weakens his case when he says that he prefers the language of Colombia for the reason that it most nearly approaches the language of Spain. Many who argue in favor of Castilian are not decidedly in favor of enforcing uniformity, and some of them intimate that a thorough mastery of the grammar, with elimination of an Anglo-Saxon accent, is far more important than the particular pronunciation adopted for certain sounds. It is perfectly evident, however, that at present the weight of expert opinion and the weight of argument are very strongly in favor of the use in our schools and colleges of Castilian.

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